

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID for SCHOOLS THE WONG WAY



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## **Why PFA?- When bad things happen children and adolescents are the most vulnerable victims**

- “The day before I started high school my mom found my brother and his wife, dead.”
- “There was a middle-aged man who brought a gun and came to our school. We had to put the school on lockdown.”
- “The water came through the house and I was drowning, and I didn’t see my parents no where.”

# How do some adults deal with child trauma?

“I don’t know what to say and I’m afraid I’ll make it worse”

Resulting Student Perceptions:

- “I had a couple teachers that did not get the point at all.”
- “I don’t really talk to them because they don’t know where I’m coming from, like nobody understands my pain.”

# How do students deal with trauma?

- “Sometimes I talk to some of my teachers because I have my favorites, they ones I feel comfortable talking to.”



# With Psychological First Aid

Every Adult On Campus  
Plays an Important Role



# The Responsibility of Caring Adults

## Psychological First Aid after School Crises

- Listen
- Protect
- Connect
- Model
- Teach



# Listen

- Encourage children to share experiences and express feelings of fear or concern
- Be willing to listen and respond to verbal and nonverbal cues
- Give children extra reassurance, support, and encouragement



# Listen: You want to convey your interest and empathy

- Where were you when this crisis happened?
- What was your first thought?
- What do you remember about that day?





# Protect

- Maintain structure, stability, and predictability. Having predictable routines, clear expectations, consistent rules, and immediate feedback
- Keep your ears open and eyes watchful, especially for bullying.
- Keep environment free of anything that could re-traumatize the child
- Validate the student's life experience

# Protect

- What's the most difficult thing to deal with right now?
- Are you worried about how you are reacting?
- Are you worried about your safety?...
  - Around other students?
  - Around adults at school or outside of school?

# Connect

- Check in with students on a regular basis
- Encourage interaction, activities, team projects with friends, teachers,
- Refer/take students to meet school counselors
- Keep track of and comment on what's going on in their lives
- Share positive feedback from parents, teachers and other adults

# Connect

- What would make things easier to cope with?
- What can I do to help you right now?
- What can your teachers do to help?
- What can your friends do to help?
- What can your family do to help?

# Model Calm and Optimistic Behavior

- Maintain level emotions and reactions with students – Stay in the middle – no highs or lows – to help them achieve balance
- Take constructive actions to assure student safety
- Express positive thoughts for the future
- Help students to cope with day to day problems

# Teach About Normal Stress Symptoms and How to Cope

Acknowledge the normal changes that can occur in people who are traumatized or grieve

- Physical Changes
- Emotional Changes
- Cognitive Changes
- Changes in Spiritual Beliefs



Help students to problem solve: How to go to school everyday/How to stay in school everyday/How to do well in school, with friends and family

# Adjustment Over Time in Crisis

A = baseline functioning

B = event

C = vulnerable state

D = usual coping mechanisms fail

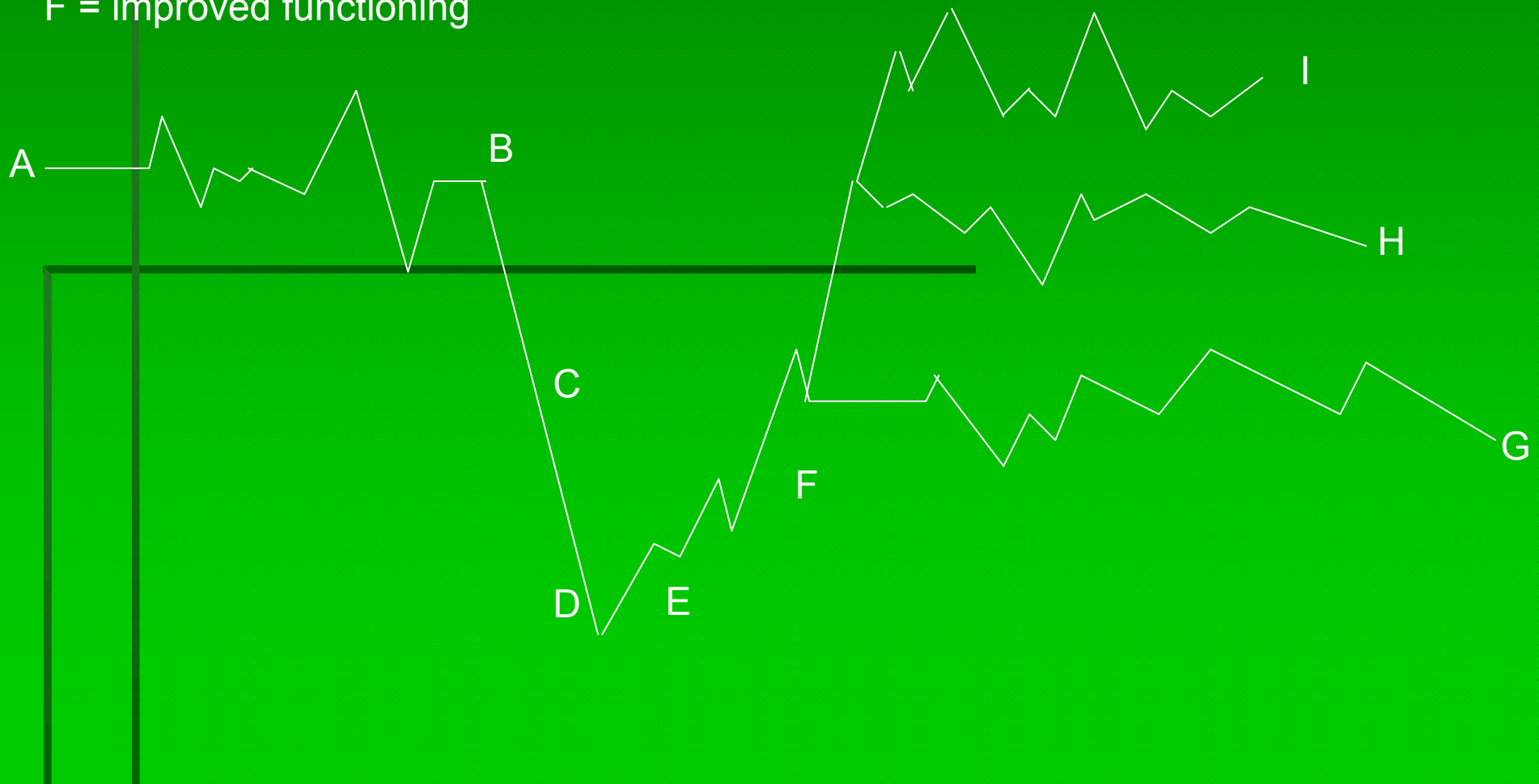
E = helplessness, hopelessness

F = improved functioning

G = continued impairment (PTS)

H = return to baseline

I = post-traumatic growth





# ***Post Traumatic Stress vs. Post Traumatic Growth***

***Post-traumatic growth is the experience or expression of positive life change as an outcome of a trauma or life crisis.***



# Hallmarks of Post Traumatic Growth

- \* New and greater strength (psychological toughness/resilience)
- \* Greater compassion and empathy for others (for those who have illness/disabilities, for one's parents/siblings)
- \* Greater psychological/emotional maturity (and greater than their age-peers)
- \* A recognition of vulnerability and struggle, and a deeper appreciation of life.
- \* New values and life priorities (often not so materialistic, heightened intimacy in relationships)
- \* Greater existential or psychospiritual clarity (who am I, what is my purpose in life)

# In order to recover

- Students must begin to take first steps by asking themselves what they can do to make things better
- Students need friends and caring adults to work through trauma and grief

# Evaluating Crisis Team Efforts

## Desirable Outcomes

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- Returns to Daily Attendance
- Resumes teacher and peer relationships
- Maintains Academic Achievement
- Look at Grades and Standardized Tests

## Undesirable Outcomes

- Increased Office Referrals
- Increased Expulsions/Suspensions/Risk Taking Behaviors
- Drops out of school

# Extra Understanding and Patience BUT...

- Educators and school staff should maintain their expectations for behavior and performance and should not be afraid of using discipline. At the same time, however, they should be prepared to provide extra support, encouragement, and crisis counseling, if needed, to help the student return to school, stay in school, and succeed academically.

# ***What can you do if you recognize that you are experiencing Traumatic Stress***

## ***A Message to Students***

- ***Come to School and Stay in School***

The safest place for students is school. The best way to relieve Traumatic Stress is to go back to your regular routines with teachers and friends

- ***Calm down and “breathe”***

You may think you are “going crazy” for feeling the way you do, but it is normal for someone who is experiencing traumatic stress. Spend a little more quiet time at home and with friends at school.

- ***No one is an Island***

Talk to an adult you trust about how you are feeling. If it is too hard to talk to your parent, talk to an adult at school or church.

- ***Help is available everyday***

If your feelings or reactions are getting in the way of getting back to your normal routine, like going to school or paying attention in class, tell your parents, a counselor and trusted teachers. Crisis Counseling at school helps most students...and adults!

# **The GOALS of PFA for Educators and Crisis Team Members**

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- Stabilize the emotions and behaviors of the student
- Return the student in an improved mental and emotional state ready to attend school and re-engage in classroom learning